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ABSTRACT

There is a growing trend for some counselors to adopt and advertise specific value positions and counseling orientations. To explore potential clients' perceptions of information contained in "traditional" and "feminist" therapists' announcements of services, 52 males and 52 females received one of four announcements (traditional, feminist, explicit feminist, explicit traditional) and reported their perceptions by responding to the Counselor Rating Form-Short (CRF-S), the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS), and a list of 20 problems. Multivariate analyses of covariance revealed a significant interaction between sex and announcement on the CRF-S trustworthiness dimension and effects for announcements on three specific problems (parental conflicts, career choice problems, and marital difficulties). No differences occurred on the CERS. Results indicated information in the announcements made no difference in perceptions of therapists' expertness and attractiveness, but women were more distrustful of the feminist therapist. Participants held lower expectations of obtaining help for marital and parental difficulties from the explicit-feminist(E-F) therapist but held most confidence in the E-F therapist for help with career problems. (JAC)

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Announcing Professional Services

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Presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, 1984.

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Announcing Professional Services

Abstract

This investigation explored the potential clients' perceptions of information contained in "traditional" and "feminist" therapists announcements of services. The "traditional", "feminist", and "explicit feminist" announcements replicated Lewis, Davis, and Lesmeister (1983). The present study amplified Lewis et al.'s design by: (a) including an "explicit traditional" condition, (b) controlling for sex, and (c) covarying out differences in both attitudes toward women and dispositions toward seeking out professional help. Fifty-two males and 52 females received one of four announcements and reported their perceptions by responding to the Counselor Rating Form-Short (CRF-S), the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS), and a list of 20 problems. Multivariate analyses of covariance revealed a significant interaction between sex and announcement on the CRF-S trustworthiness dimension and effects for announcements on three specific problems. No differences occurred on the CERS. Implications for practitioners and research were discussed.

Announcing Professional Services

Most practitioners probably rely upon telephone book announcements while others may supplement telephone book information with written descriptions made available to potential clients. Service providers who restrict their announcements to phone book listings under their professional title depend to some extent on an amorphous occupational reputation to convey an impression of their attitudes, beliefs, practices, and values. Research suggests that potential consumers do perceive various mental health professionals differentially (e.g., Gelso & Karl, 1974; Getsinger & Garfield, 1976; Simon, 1973). Investigators have also examined the impact of providing potential consumers of services with brief descriptions of therapists' services and values (Nathan, Joanning, Duckro, & Beal, 1978).

The past two decades has seen a growing trend for some service providers to adopt specific value positions by aligning their counseling orientation with specific social movements (e.g., feminist, gay, Christian, minority, etc.). Announcements and information about professional services often include mention of such allegiances.

Lewis, Davis, and Lesmeister (1983) studied the impact of varying amounts of pretherapy information regarding feminist therapist's values and counseling orientation on analogue, feminist-oriented clients. Lewis et al. exposed profeminist subjects to either (a) a "traditional" telephone book listing,

(b) an identical advertisement with the addition of the words "feminist therapist," or (c) a brief information sheet containing the same information as the "feminist" therapist plus an explicit summary detailing feminist values and assumptions held by the therapist ("explicit feminist"). The profeminist subjects viewed themselves as holding values most dissimilar with the "explicit feminist" therapist. Subjects discriminated among the three therapists when asked to predict their level of confidence in obtaining help for specific problems. Overall, subjects expressed the most confidence in "feminist" therapist. The "explicit feminist" therapist generally received the lowest confidence ratings. Subjects expressed least confidence in the helpfulness from a "traditional" therapist for only two problems, namely, career choice and difficulty making friends.

Lewis et al. (1983) findings raise important questions for feminist-oriented psychotherapy and practitioners because of the impact of clients' perceptions of similarity between the client's and therapist's values. However, interpretations of Lewis et al's findings also require modulation in light of several methodological considerations. First, no attempt was made to control for sex. Second, a "traditional" therapist condition with more specific information paralleling the "explicit feminist" description was not included. Finally, Lewis et al.'s sample was limited to subjects espousing profeminist values.

The present investigation was designed to elaborate on Lewis et al.'s findings by investigating the role of client sex and including an "explicit traditional" therapist condition.

This condition contained the same information in the "traditional" listing and also incorporated an explicit summary of values and assumptions made by the traditional therapist. The present investigation was intended to assess attitudes of a cross-section of potential clients rather than profeminists only. However, as females generally hold more liberal attitudes concerning women than men (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973), this factor was taken into account. Further, clinical lore and research (e.g., Fischer & Turner, 1970) suggest that women hold more positive dispositions than men toward seeking professional help. Consequently an attempt was also made to control for this factor.

The present study investigated the following questions. After accounting for differences in both attitudes concerning women and predispositions about seeking mental health services, do potential clients form differential impressions of counselors' characteristics as a function of the amount of pretherapy information about the therapist? Second, after accounting for differential attitudes toward women and psychotherapy, do potential clients express differing expectancies regarding their confidence in the therapists' ability to provide help depending upon the amount of prior information they receive about the therapist? Finally, is sex of the potential clients a factor in addressing the questions above?

Method

Subjects

Fifty-two males (mean age = 20.8 years) and 52 females (mean age = 21.0 years enrolled in psychology courses at a

large southwestern university composed the sample. All subjects received research credit for their participation.

Pre-experimental Measures

All subjects completed a demographic information sheet and two pre-measures prior to the experimental manipulation. Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's (1970) abridged version of the Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS) was employed to determine subjects' feminist orientations while Fischer and Turner's (1970) Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (APPHS) assessed subject's willingness to consult service providers.

Design and Manipulations

Four announcements of services were prepared which conveyed differing amounts of information about a female therapist. The traditional (T), feminist (F), and explicit feminist (E-F) announcements replicated Lewis et al.'s (1983) procedure. In the T condition, subjects read a yellow-page announcement which was a listing for a woman, licensed clinical psychologist who provided individual and marital counseling. Participants given the F announcement received an identical listing with the words "feminist therapist" added. Subjects in the E-F condition received a summary page containing the same information in the F announcement with the addition of a brief statement concerning the values and assumptions the therapist espoused. Finally, the explicit traditional (E-T) announcement contained the same information found in the T listing along with a brief statement of the therapist's values and assumptions. The E-T summary sheet was composed to mirror the information on the E-F sheet

as closely as possible. The primary technique employed to accomplish this goal was to simply drop the word "feminist" wherever it appeared.

An equal number of male and female volunteers were randomly assigned to the four conditions until each cell frequency reached 13. As subjects arrived, a male experimenter explained to the subjects that the experiment was designed to examine impressions conveyed by pretherapy information concerning therapists. Participants then completed the pre-measures and read one of the four announcements. After the pre-measures and announcements were turned in, subjects responded to the post-measures and received their research credit.

Post-Measures

Participants completed four questionniares after reading the announcements. Corrigan and Schmidt's (1983) revised and shortened version of the Counselor Rating Form - Short (CRF-S) assessed subjects' perceptions of counselors' expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness.

Subjects were provided with a list of 20 specific personal problems and asked to rate the degree of confidence (using a 6-point scale) they had that the therapist described would be helpful in overcoming each problem (Lewis et al., 1983).

Subjects then rated on 8-point scales the likelihood that they would recommend the counselor to a friend needing help and their perception of optimism about the helpfulness of counseling with the therapist described. Finally, as manipulation checks, subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed

that the therapist was a feminist on an 8-point Likert scale where 1 represented strongly agree and 8 signified strongly disagree. Each subject answered "yes" or "no" to the question asking whether the psychologist was licensed.

Results

Pre-measures and Manipulation Checks

Separate 2 X 4 (sex by announcements) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed on the AWS and the APHMS to determine whether, as speculated, differences between sexes existed on these dimensions. Females achieved a higher mean score on the AWS than the males, 55.9 and 48.8 respectively, $F(1,94) = 13.5$, $p < .01$. Thus the women initially held more profeminist attitudes than the men. Table 1 shows women held significantly more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help than men on the Need Recognition and Confidence subscales as well as for total score.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Only the therapist factor in the ANOVA for subjects' perceptions of the therapist being a feminist was significant, $F(3,94) = 8.24$, $p < .001$. Inspection of the means revealed that announcements containing the word "feminist" (F and E-F conditions) were rated as more feminist than announcements ommitting the word. The Duncan range test indicated the E-F announcement was perceived as more feminist ($p < .05$) than the

other three announcements (T, F, E-T). Additionally, the F announcement was perceived as significantly more feminist-oriented than the E-T announcement ($p < .05$). Inspection of participants responses to whether or not the psychologist was licensed revealed that 96 subjects responded "yes", seven subjects responded "no", and one subject did not respond.

Post-Measures

Since females possessed more favorable dispositions than males on the ATW and APHHS, these two pre-measures were used as covariates in subsequent multiple analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) performed on conceptually related sets of dependent variables. As some subjects did not complete all measures, some MANCOVA's involved slightly differing n's.

The expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness scores from the CRF-S were included in the first MANCOVA. Only the interaction effect for this MANCOVA attained significance $F(9,207) = 2.47$, $p < .01$. The univariate analyses of these three CRF-S measures only revealed an interaction effect for trustworthiness, $F(3,87) = 4.67$, $p < .01$. Table 2 presents the observed and adjusted means for the trustworthiness interaction. Employing the Duncan range test, no differences emerged for males but females perceived the F therapist as less trustworthy than the other three psychologists ($p < .01$). No further differences among the females occurred.

Insert Table 2 About Here

MANCOVA of the Confidence ratings for the 20 specific problems revealed an effect only for the therapist factor, $F(60,213) = 1.86$, $p < .005$. Significant univariate effects for the therapist announcements emerged on subjects' confidence ratings for parental conflicts ($p < .05$), career choice problems ($p < .01$), and marital difficulties ($p < .05$). For parental conflicts, subjects expressed less confidence in the E-F therapist than the remaining therapists ($p < .05$). For career choice, however, the participants felt more confidence in the E-F psychologist than in the E-T or T counselor ($p < .05$). With respect to marital problems, both the F and T therapists received higher confidence ratings than the E-F psychologist. No other differences occurred. The final MANCOVA, conducted on the participants' ratings of optimism about receiving help from the psychologist and the likelihood of recommending the therapist to a friend seeking professional help, yielded a therapist effect ($F(3,89) = 4.45$, $p < .01$). Univariate analyses for participants' optimism ratings showed subjects held less optimism in getting help from the E-F therapist than from each of the other three psychologists. No other univariate effects occurred.

Discussion

Analyses of the manipulation check data suggested that subjects attended to information furnished to them and that they discriminated key information related to the independent variable (feminist versus traditional). While Lewis et al.

(1983) restricted their sample to profemenists, the current study evaluated the impact of feminist therapists after accounting for initial differences in feminist orientation as well as differences in proclivities for turning to service providers for professional help.

With regard to client's perceptions of therapist's expertness and attractiveness, information in the pretherapy announcements made no difference. On the other hand how trustworthy clients' judged the psychologist depended upon the subject's sex and the information contained in the announcement. While males did not discriminate among the announcements, females did. Interestingly females were most distrustful of the F therapist. Possibly in the general population, women are more sensitized to popularized therapy labels. Thus potential women clients may avoid a female therapist labelling herself with the word feminist due to suspicions and stereotypes about just what is involved in such therapy.

With respect to subjects confidence about the therapist's ability to help, participants held lower expectations of obtaining help from the E-F therapist for marital and parental difficulties. Subjects held most confidence in the E-F therapist in helping with career problems. Potential clients may view career problems as involving economic, political, and environmental forces which restrict opportunities. In dealing with vocational issues, clients may perceive a more social-action-oriented therapist as a more promising resource

for dealing with such forces. Indeed, the E-F announcement alluded to economic and social discrimination as one of the therapist's tenets concerning the exclusive causes of women's problems. However, this same, explicit proactive orientation toward feminism may be viewed as inappropriate for more personal, intimate relationship problems (parents and marriage). For such problems, clients may desire a therapist who is more "traditional" or who at least does not espouse explicit profeminist attitudes and beliefs in environmental and social causes for all psychological difficulties. Interestingly, Lewis et al.'s (1983) profeminist subjects showed a parallel pattern. Their subjects displayed least confidence in the E-F therapist for help with parental problems and greater confidence in the E-F therapist for career problems.

Participants expressed less optimism that they could personally benefit from counseling with the E-F psychologist than from the F, T, or E-T therapist. Perhaps this supports the belief that potential clients do discriminate therapists by the values service providers publicly espouse. While no differences occurred in clients' likelihood of recommending any of the therapists to a friend, potential clients appeared more cautious that they themselves would be helped by the E-F therapist.

Therapists should note that how as well as whether they choose to advertise their orientation is likely to create impressions for potential clients. In some cases, explicit

elaboration of feminist values and beliefs may increase clients' confidence that the therapist can help (e.g., career problems). The present study suggests that therapists should be alert to how they advertise their beliefs and values. Perhaps differences would be more dramatic if attitudes toward women and seeking professional help were not controlled. For professionals who wish to make their livelihood doing therapy, it may be sage advice to "let the provider beware".

Table 1

Means for the APHHS

Scales	Males M	Females M	F
Need recognition	13.35	15.88	8.31**
Stigma tolerance	8.39	8.79	.82
Interpersonal openness	13.16	13.92	1.27
Confidence	16.10	17.85	5.32*
Total	51.0	56.4	6.68*

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .005$

Table 2

Observed and Adjusted Trustworthiness Means for Males and Females

Sex	M	Therapist Announcement E-F	E-T	F	T
Males	Observed	21.07	22.91	23.07	20.60
	Adjusted	21.45	23.32	23.43	21.22
Femals	Observed	22.58	22.30	18.09	22.15
	Adjusted	22.45	21.54	17.63	21.83

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